

The 20th anniversary of The Wrestling Observer Newsletter is upon us. Twenty years ago, Dave Meltzer launched what some have called the dirtiest of the dirtsheets, and what others think is the premiere source of information about pro wrestling in the world. To commemorate the anniversary, I conducted the following interview with Meltzer, who takes us through 20 years of covering this strange industry.

Q: How did you first become a wrestling fan?

A: Wow. I was 10 years old, and actually, all of my friends at school were wrestling fans, so I was late at becoming a fan in my group. We would get together and play baseball on Saturday afternoons, but they always had to stop to go to someone's house and watch wrestling. Roy Shire's wrestling was the first stuff I saw. I'd run home and watch the end of bowling on ABC, and then watch Roy Shire which was our Saturday afternoon ritual. I was pretty much hooked from the start. Just by the interviews and personalities. The first time I went to the live shows, my God, Ray Stevens was there for the first year. So were Pat Patterson, Peter Maivia, Rocky Johnson, Superstar Billy Graham. I actually saw The Rock at the matches in San Jose when he was really young, just a kid running around. They also had Pepper Gomez and Mr. Saito.

Q: Who was the first wrestler you considered your favorite?

A: I guess initially, my favorite was Billy Graham, because of his interviews, but it became Pat Patterson after Stevens left. He was the class worker in the territory. A little later, my favorite wrestlers became Dory Funk Jr. and Jack Brisco. My family went on vacation to other parts of the country, and I spent a lot of time in Florida. The Florida guys had so much more wrestling in their matches than what we saw out of San Francisco.

Q: Did you find yourself defending your interest in wrestling from people who wanted to know how you could watch "that fake stuff?"

A: Oh yeah, I constantly defended it. I thought the people who were arguing, the people asking why watch it because it's fake just didn't get it. Let me tell you something. The minute you see a midget match on TV, it becomes pretty clear what it is. The first time you see a gimmick finish, it gets you mad, but when you see the exact same set of bizarre circumstances occur several times, it becomes pretty clear that it is a show. It was just never an issue to me. I always thought people who made a big deal of it being predetermined were missing the point. I got into a lot of arguments about it, and I always won them, because people couldn't get past the fact that movies and plays were fake, too. The funny thing was, this was when the Harlem Globetrotters were really popular, and that's an athletic exhibition with a predetermined outcome, just like pro wrestling.

Q: When and how did you develop an interest in journalism?

A: My parents tell me that even at five years old, I was always writing. I know I've been doing it ever since I remember. I know when I was five that I wanted to be a sports writer.

Q: How did the two come together? Did you read the newsletters that were around when you were a kid?

A: I started writing about wrestling about a year into my being a wrestling fan. I actually did a newsletter from 1971 to 75. Then, I can't say I lost interest, but the wrestling in California was terrible. I had subscribed to the wrestling programs in Florida, so I could keep up with the storylines for when I got to go there on vacation. I was also trading audiotapes around then. I was getting stuff from all over the country, and I have probably heard every interview building up a Madison Square Garden house show from 1971 through 1985. Then, when Georgia got on cable and I got to see that weekly, I got really interested in it again then.

Q: How did the Observer get started?

A: Well, I had no idea it would turn out to be what it has. This was 1982, and by then, I was in the first round of guys trading videotapes. There were some before me, but not much before me. 1982 was also the year I started getting Japan TV weekly. That's when Tiger Mask was the big rage, because no one had seen anything like it before. It was really clear that guy was going to change the business. Seeing those tapes made me want to do a newsletter. Up to then, everybody judged wrestlers based on who they beat, which is a ridiculous way to rate wrestlers. The result was no one thought about who was good, who was having the best matches. I was kind of thinking who the good wrestlers were from the bad, and with video, you could finally see the fake versus the real, so to speak. There are two things I remember. One was, I was writing letters to everyone I was trading tapes with, and I said, "Why not just do one letter?" The other thing was that in my San José State journalism class, there were guys who were huge wrestling fans, and these guys were always asking me questions. They would never read a wrestling magazine, because it insulted their intelligence. I started doing a newsletter, and they subscribed right way. I remember thinking if people would buy those wrestling magazines, there must be a million people around the world who'd read this. I never did get a million subscribers, and it was probably about 1985 or '86 before I first thought this could possibly be a career.

Q: How did word get out about it, to the point that you were able to build readership?

A: Some of the wrestling magazines in '70s had a fan club corner, and in the '80s, there was still some of that. I let people know about it through that. I actually wasn't well liked in the fan underground, even though everyone in it had to read the Observer. The younger fans liked it, but the older fans didn't, especially the big wheels in the fan club world. They knew what wrestling was, but were not allowed to say it. Of course, I wasn't the first guy to do it. Almost everything I did, Norm Dooley was the first guy to do.

Q: Whatever happened to him?

A: I really don't know. He never really took it further. He was a really funny guy. I used to love getting that newsletter – "Norman Dooley's Weasel World of Wrestling."

Q: How many tapes do you think you accumulated over the years?

A: I couldn't even guess. There are just huge crates all over the house of everything. I haven't kept up with my collection very much. I've saved the pay per views that didn't stink. I've saved every Japanese show from the late 1970s on, but so much is not labeled that it probably would not do anyone any good.

Q: What was the circulation for the first issue of the Observer?

A: Geez, probably around 30 (laughs).

Q: How did you decide on the no-frills format of the Observer?

A: That came in 1985. I had taken a job with a soccer magazine, and didn't have time for an illustrated thing anymore. I had kind of decided to give up the newsletter, and partly because wrestling was changing. I saw that the kind of wrestling I grew up on was going to die. Vince was going to take off, and the Watts/Boesch version of wrestling was going to die. Paul Boesch certainly didn't see it. Two days after the first Wrestlemania, I told Paul, "This is it. He's won." Paul said, "He didn't do well in Houston. He never does." I said, "But, Paul, he's got NBC and he's going to keep buying the best guys. I really wasn't that fond of that WWF product, but the thing is, this business is always going to change, and you can't be a baby about it and live in past. My God, look at the last two years. If I only wanted wrestling to be what it was, I'd have gone crazy just in the last two years.

Q: Did you see the Observer as more of a trade journal for people in the business, or as a new way of covering wrestling for fans?

A: Oh, a new way for fans, definitely. I didn't think it was anything for the wrestlers. I was writing it for people who really needed a new way to watch wrestling. I didn't want it to be a gossip thing for the wrestling business, but it's the closest thing to that, too.

Q: How did you adopt the use of wrestling lingo, like "face," "heel" and "get over?"

A: I think it gradually worked in. There was some of that early on. When it became the lingo that the readership used, I used it too. The readership now is so different than 20 years ago. The readership is so much smarter.

Q: How did you initially get people to talk to you? Did you encounter any resistance, threats of violence, or anything like that?

A: I think what happened was a couple of things. A lot of people who talked to me at first assumed I knew more than I did. I listened a lot, so that helped. Once the Observer became something, a lot of wrestlers wanted to talk. A lot of smart wrestlers talked really quickly. They

knew they were getting lied to about payoffs, and they'd ask me what the house was here or there. In the dishonesty of that business, there were a lot of people in the business looking for something that wasn't so dishonest. Even though they had been taught to be dishonest, this was their real lives.

Q: How did you see attitudes start to change about the Observer?

A: For those who interacted with me, they changed pretty quick. It was one of those things where everyone would say, "Blah" about me, but then those were the same ones talking to me. Everyone wanted information, but they were in this business where all the information was false. I got people saying nasty things about me behind my back, but directly, there was not as much as one would imagine. When I first started, wrestling was a con man business, for whatever it is now. If the con men thought I was doing a good job, then I knew I was doing a terrible job. I always thought they should hate me, if they hated me for telling the truth. If I was always wrong, they could just laugh it off.

Q: One of the early major stories you covered was the 20/20 show that promised to expose wrestling in early 1985. How much of an effect on the business did you think that would have?

A: I thought it would have no impact. Everybody thought it would kill the business, but they didn't realize most of the fans knew it was entertainment anyway. I remember talking to (ABC news reporter John) Stossel before and after he did the story, and I told him that, like, every fan in country knew that, aside from showing how guys cut themselves with a razor blade. I said, "Here's an industry you could really look at, but you did a lazy piece." David Schultz hitting him is what made it one of most famous pieces in history, obviously. I still believe it really did have no effect on wrestling. You know, 1985 was a great year for everybody. Well, almost everybody.

Next: In Part 2 of the interview, Dave Meltzer talks about Bruiser Brody, the Observer awards, the WWF's Gulf War angle and the Vince McMahon steroid trial.

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This is the second part of an interview with Wrestling Observer Newsletter editor Dave Meltzer, looking back at 20 years of the Wrestling Observer, in commemoration of the newsletter's 20th anniversary. For the first part of the interview, visit <http://www.liveaudiowrestling.com/wo/news/headlines/default.asp?aID=6538>

Q: You've said the Brody death was tough for you to write about. How was it, interacting with him, and what kind of impact did he have on the Observer?

A: The thing with him was that he came from a different world. He was a sports writer before going into wrestling. He was in Japan, where there was coverage everywhere. As to the idea that honest coverage would kill wrestling, he knew that myth wasn't true. I used to hear stories that he would not only read it in wrestling dressing rooms, he'd defend it. He wasn't the only one, though. Eddie Gilbert once told me a story about Brody getting some heat over the Observer. It wasn't that he was reading it, but when everyone around him talked about how the newsletter was killing the business, he would say, "Why? Because he's telling the truth. With Brody, he was a big believer in journalists telling things like they were. One time, Jake Roberts had flunked a drug test, and someone in the WWF said if I printed it, it could cost Jake his job. I printed that some guys failed a test, but didn't name anyone at the time, although it would have been obvious reading the issue. Brody said "It's not your job to protect Jake Roberts." He was right.

Q: What about having to write the actual obituary piece on Brody? Wasn't that the first of the lengthy obituaries to appear in the Observer?

A: It was impossible. It's still one of the hardest ones I ever did. You know, a lot of them got hard over the years, but that was ... (Pauses) One thing, I had never written a story like that, and I knew it was a risk, because I knew a lot of people wouldn't like it. As it turned out, I got 90 percent praise, but there were a lot of angry people who asked why I thought that story deserved seven pages. Now, everyone expects it. The other thing was, then I was writing it with a typewriter. It was a one-shot process, no editing. At first, I sat there for, like, four or five hours and couldn't come up with the lead. I started Saturday, and just sat there from 7 p.m. to midnight. I came up with the lead and just wrote straight until 5 a.m. the next morning. There's been no other story I've ever written like that. The story on Owen Hart dying was hard, Pillman was hard. Writing an obituary for Lou Thesz was hard, because my feeling was he was arguably the greatest, so therefore, the story had to be of the caliber of anything I ever wrote.

Q: Do you feel it held up to that standard?

A: The Thesz response was tremendous. To me, Thesz, Kerry Von Erich and Junkyard Dog, to me, are the ones that I really caught the essence of the person. I was trying to get some insight of what clicked and what didn't click. With Thesz, it was a different time he wrestled in. It wasn't long ago in some ways, but it was absolutely a different world and a different place. It was something that unless you were there, I don't think people got. The same thing about Tim Woods -- a lot of older fans wrote very nice things about that, and a couple wrote that it was a shame, because this is one most of the readers won't get, because it was a time and a place they don't know. Owen and Pillman were different in that sense, because most people saw Owen and Pillman.

Q: How did the Observer awards get started?

A: Well, they actually predate the newsletter. My first issue was January 1983. The

awards go back to 1980. I initially did the awards with the people I traded tapes with. I guess, from 1980 to 1982, they were more tape trader awards. From then on, though, they became Observer reader awards.

Q: How did you get the idea to do the Who's Who in Wrestling book in 1986?

A: That's when kind of when I had figured I could actually make a career of this, because wrestling was going to take off. I needed something to really jump-start it, and I figured that would put me on the map. I thought I needed something besides the Observer to be known. I kept up with wrestling in Europe, Japan and Mexico, so I had knowledge of guys most people had never even seen.

Q: That project was followed by the big, oversized yearbooks, which you did through 1990. Why did you then decide to stop doing yearbooks?

A: The yearbooks started getting bigger, and it got to where I never had a Christmas. It was like, no sleep in the whole month of December (laughs). Those were really profitable, but there was also a point where I said, "I will never do another one. I will never put myself through that again." (Pro Wrestling Torch editor) Wade Keller eventually quit doing them too, and I think for pretty much the same reasons of time. I think we both could do them now, and they'd probably make tons of money, but they're just not worth it.

Q: How did you end up with a column at The National (a now-defunct sports newspaper)?

A: Well, it started with Frank Deford in 1990. He wanted to do a wrestling column because it was something different. He wasn't really a wrestling fan, but he was a huge roller derby fan. Knowing how huge it was, even though he didn't like it, he knew wrestling had a lot of fans and thought it deserved some coverage. I don't know how popular the column was, but I do know the Tuesday paper it ran in was the best-selling issue of the week. Of course, it was also the day after Monday Night Football, but when he was asked who was the best writer he had, he said, "I can't tell you who is the best, but the most popular is Dave Meltzer." He told me he had decided on that, to do a wrestling column, and he asked the associate editor of the Los Angeles Times, who had read the newsletter and asked Dick Ebersol with NBC, who he knew and who was partners with Vince on Saturday Night Main Event at the time, and they both said Meltzer is the only one. The Ebersol thing was a huge shock to me, because right when I first started the first week, it was Ebersol's friends in WWF that put up the red flag to Deford, and said, "You can't do that."

Q: These friends were the WWF top brass?

A: Oh, yeah. They were trying to get me out as soon as the first column came out. They were afraid I knew too much, and they were doing well pulling the wool over people's eyes in those days. It was a situation where there were two major promotions in the U.S. WCW wasn't

making money, they were floundering. Vince was obviously king of the hill. They wanted Madison Avenue to think Vince was the only guy who knew how to promote wrestling. When I'd cover a Tokyo Dome show, where New Japan was putting 60,000 into that building, they'd go crazy. The story that the WWF had made wrestling bigger than ever was an illusion, and I think they didn't like that Madison Avenue would know that.

Q: Was The National ever popular enough nationwide to warrant that concern?

A: Well, The National was never really big and successful, but New York's the media capital, so you know people there were reading. I remember once I did the 10 biggest crowds ever, and there were some Tokyo Dome show crowds there, and WWF called and said it wasn't fair to list those shows. I think it was because it showed WWF wasn't the only company in the world that knew how to successfully promote wrestling.

Q: Whatever hard feelings there were with the WWF seemed to intensify after your criticism of their Gulf War angle with Hogan and Sgt Slaughter. At what point did it go from criticism of angle and tactics to them trying to get you fired from the paper?

A: Well, I wrote an editorial saying it was in bad taste, and back then, they weren't used to being criticized for angles. That's really what it was, nothing more. At the time, it was new to them and they just didn't like it. They knew it was something a lot of important people read. Plus, I had some insight, because I knew what the game was. When they sent Hogan on that USO tour, they said none of it would never air on television. Then, it's the opening of their TV the next week. It's how a wrestling promoter would think, if you think about it. There really is something ugly about that thought process, but it was like, "Hey, now we're in a war. We have a really hot angle." I guess they could have gone in a different direction, but they just weren't going to let the fact that we were in a war dictate their booking, or let good taste do it, either (laughs).

Q: Were you surprised they didn't try to make something of the more recent international strife?

A: No, no, no. On 9/11, I knew they wouldn't do it. No way. Back to 1991, it ended up that Wrestlemania VII did all right on pay per view, but it was down from year before. Ticket sales were bad enough that they moved to a smaller building. It wasn't one of finer moments in Wrestlemania history.

Q: How did you repair relations with the WWF, and with JJ Dillon, who had been your contact there?

A: Technically nothing, it was just just time passing. I did nothing, on my end. What happened was, as far as Titan goes, there was a wrestling war going on. That pretty much repaired it, know what I mean? I guess you'd have to ask Vince the answer to that one. He goes thru those whims, like now, with them not talking to any of the Internet people. I just think there's no competition. They don't even want the gates out now.

Q: Do you think that ties into what you were saying earlier, about wrestlers' pay being based on gates?

A: No. See, the thing they're doing is that they run almost all major arenas. You can cheat in small arenas like the old promoters did regularly, but when you're running the San Jose arena, attendance is computerized, and there's a printout. It's pretty cut and dry the way they operate. I think they probably just want to repair relations when they want to.

Q: What effect did that communication breakdown in 1991 have on your ability to Report?

A: Nothing at all. What happened was, after that was the steroid thing, and I was talking to Vince more during that time than during any other period. Whatever happened after the war on their side didn't last long.

Q: Shortly before this came the admission from the WWF about it being predetermined, with the New Jersey athletic commission. What kind of impact did you think such a public admission from a wrestling promoter would have on the business?

A: None, for the same reason as in 1985. If you give an entertaining product, people will come to be entertained, and if you don't, they won't. It's that simple. A lot of people thought that would kill the business, and the year after wasn't a bad year at all. I think far too much has been made of that story in terms of its effect on the business itself. They would have changed the product anyway. Jarrett never admitted it, and he was doing wacky stuff in the 80s. There was a change in states that dropped regulation. Titan didn't have to answer to people, but I never heard of anything a commission did that stopped WWE from doing something in years that would have really made a bit of difference. Now, Nevada's commission freaked out over the Disco Inferno versus Jacqueline match that WCW did years later. But that didn't make a difference to fans. In the end, the admission was no big deal to fans, and it probably saved the company some tax money. There's no commission that was going to tell WWE that they can't powerbomb Mae Young through a table. I wish someone had (laughs). I mean, she's really tough, but that was still a bad idea because what if it had gone wrong.

Q: What about the McMahon steroid trial? What did you learn, as a reporter, from covering it? Was that your first time to cover a trial so extensively?

A: Well, I don't know that I learned anything that made me a better reporter there. As far as wrestling, the guys got smaller, and the business went way down, and guys quit WWF for various reasons. They all happened to be the bigger guys, and business was down for several years;. As a kid in journalism class, I had covered trials before, but that was my first one for wrestling live, but the Zahorian trial was a pretty big deal and I kept up on that as it was going on pretty extensively.

Q: Where did that case fall apart? Was it just mistakes by the prosecution, or was McMahon just not guilty?



A: Well, there was some sloppy work as far as the way it was prosecuted. One charge was dated October 24 as a day when steroids were sent by Zahorian to McMahon, and supposedly taken to the Nassau Coliseum to be distributed to Hogan. But the Nassau show was October 18, making that impossible from a time line standpoint. The whole case had a problem in the jurisdiction. Titan was in Connecticut, but the New York prosecutors wanted the case, and that's why they brought up the Nassau show. It really should have been tried in Connecticut. That was a tough one. The main charge was a conspiracy between McMahon and Zahorian, and that was a tough one to prove, considering even Zahorian admitted he and McMahon never spoke a word about it. The best you could say is McMahon knew Zahorian was distributing steroids to the wrestlers, which he did since one of the people he was distributing to was McMahon, and that McMahon at the time did nothing to discourage it. But saying that and proving he was involved in a conspiracy to distribute was a big difference.

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This is the third of a three-part interview with Wrestling Observer Newsletter editor Dave Meltzer, who commemorated 20 years of publishing the Observer last month.

Q: As a reporter, how was it different covering the Monday wars than the territorial era?

A: Well, I don't know that it was more difficult to cover. It was nasty. Really, it was just a more visible version of the same promotional war that had been going on since 1984. The difference was, Vince was finally fighting someone who was more publicly even with him. If you go back to the 1980s, Crockett was beating Vince in the ratings at times, and Watts did as well on the quarter Mid-South was on TBS. If you look at 1985, Watts was beating Vince, and he had a worse timeslot on TBS than Vince had. Back then, they didn't pay as much attention to ratings. By bragging about it when Nitro was beating Raw, Eric Bischoff made it a big issue. Going back to the '80s, Vince was dominant in New York and in L.A. Even at times when Crockett was winning in Baltimore or Philadelphia, no one would pay attention to it. Still, Crockett never had the money to outspend the WWF. Turner eventually opened up and took some WWF stars, which was what they should have done from the very beginning. When they first took over, their feeling was, "We have to keep it on a budget." Well, you can't run a national wrestling promotion on a tight budget when you have a competitor, because that competitor is going to beat you up.

Q: Would an example of that be WCW letting Sid Vicious go in 1991?

A: Well, it's hard to keep someone who was no showing left and right, trying to get fired. It wasn't until WCW started raiding Vince for his own talent that Vince had to fight someone who was fighting the same game he was. He ended up kind of being a crybaby in that position. The ironies of that were unbelievable.

Q: Also during the 1990s, the Internet gained a lot of prominence, with a lot of people starting wrestling news sites. Has the immediacy of people being able to put up news hurt the newsletter?

A: Well, I could do that, too, on my site. It has changed the newsletter some, but the Observer is more analysis of news than breaking news. I look at it in two ways. It hurt, in that the Observer was not the fastest source for news, but it helped in that more people knew about the newsletter than ever before. It was a double-edged sword. Either way, it's out of my control, so I just make the best of it. In the long run, it's the interest in wrestling that determines how well the Observer does. If there was no Internet, last year would have been a struggle for me, because interest in wrestling went down, and that awareness of people learning about it on the Internet certainly didn't hurt. The Internet allowed me to do the eYada show, which has been a pretty strong positive, in terms of exposure to the newsletter. As to the business, it's been a pretty strong positive, to a degree. The negative is that stories I hear for the first time on the 'Net, I check. There's usually a 30 to 50 percent accuracy, but it becomes true in people's eyes. Sometimes, there's a sort-of true story, but it gets misinterpreted, so it comes out so different than it really is.

Q: You've also been involved in some other projects over the years, like sending scouting reports of Japanese talent to WWF in the early 1980s and the Observer Hotline a decade later. Did any of these represent conflicts of interest for you?

A: The WWF thing? Not for me, but with the perception from other people, yeah, I'm sure it did. These days, there are so many people who are writers who work directly for wrestling companies. I think wrestling fans ... (pauses) ... I don't think it's an issue in most people's eyes. When I was doing the hotline, and Scott Hudson got a job with WCW, I took him off the hotline. Now, I think, that was a pretty stupid move. Madden was the same way, but him leaving was more his decision than mine. Hudson -- if the same thing was going on now, I wouldn't make the same decision. I think when we started doing the eyada show, it became a hassle to do. We'd spend all these hours working on the show, and then have to come up with stuff to put on the 900 line. Plus, 900 numbers were becoming passe, so it was a lot of work, and it wasn't making enough money to justify the amount of work, so it was time to let it go. Your question about the Internet -- the 'Net did kill 900 lines, no doubt about it. These so-called 'Net "reporters" call our 900 lines and that was their report the next day. You know, why pay to call, when someone else will pay for you, put in on their site, and you get it for free?

Q: One of the things I've heard from people who criticize your work and your analysis of the wrestling business is, "If you're so smart, why don't you have a job booking?" What would be your response to that?

A: I guess I'd say, "Because wrestling companies aren't so smart." I don't think I could do worse than Vince Russo did in WCW, could I? I couldn't possibly be worse than that. I can't imagine I would accept a job like that if somebody offered it. I couldn't imagine I'd come up with anything worse than what they put on Raw. I'm not saying I'd be as good as Cornette is on OVW. I guess you've got to ask the people who are running the wrestling companies. I like what I'm doing now. I have studied more wrestling booking than probably almost anyone in the world. I'm certainly in the top 1 percent. I know that a lot of people who are pretty smart on booking come to me for advice. I don't know. I've heard that before, but I think it's a pretty stupid view to take.

Q: Are there Observer readers on all six populated Continents?

A: Well, right, there are no readers in Antarctica (laughs). Let's see, I know I have subscribers in Australia, Asia, Europe and a couple in South America. I used to have a few in Africa, but I don't think I do right now.

Q: What distinction do you make in your writing, between being a reporter breaking the news objectively and an analyst, relying on your opinions?

A: I don't. The whole thing is analysis. There is a lot of straightforward news, but the idea of the Observer is to analyze the news.

Q: What's been the most challenging story for you to cover as a reporter?

A: No question, the period in 1991 and '92, after the Zahorian trial but before the McMahon trial, when steroids were the big issue, because it was a technical issue I had to learn a lot about. So many different people were saying so many different things that didn't jibe.

Q: Are you still a walking encyclopedia of facts about Steroids?

A: (laughs) No, no. To give a bad example, my knowledge of steroids would be like bringing Bill Watts back to wrestling today, with him not watching any wrestling in years. I'm 11 years out of date with steroids. If something happened and it was a big deal, I'll have a lot of catching up to do. It's hard to say if that'll happen, because the public is more knowledgeable about them, and just doesn't care as much. In the 1980s, there were all these public service announcements, the big "say no to drugs campaign." You don't see that in wrestling today, even though so many guys are fired and arrested due to drugs. I think people have seen so much between athletes that they expect everyone to be on steroids. It's like now, there are so many dead wrestlers, and I mean premature deaths, that people are numb to it. They're certainly not the big deal they were when David Von Erich or Brody died. People think about it for a day, and then it's like it's yesterday's news.

Q: Once the facts have been compiled, what's been the hardest thing for you to actually sit down and write?

A: Either the Brody or Pillman pieces. Writing about Pillman was very, very hard. Owen Hart was pretty hard, because of the timing and everything. I don't even know how I put out an issue that week, but I did. So much happened in a three-day period that it was a blur. The writing itself wasn't as hard as between dealing with all the mainstream media and all the shock of what happened, and how the WWF handled it. It was just an incredibly hard couple of days.

Q: One of the things about what you do is that you're trying to shed a journalistic light on a traditionally secretive and as you called it earlier, a "con man business." How do you know you're not being worked when you talk to people in the business?

A: They always are working, or lying, but it's like any reporter who's dealing with politicians. To me, that's why I've gotta be on my toes, and if something doesn't jibe factually, I've got to pick it up. A lot of times, when guys give bad stories, they're honest guys with bad memories. It's like in Jerry Lawler's book, he remembers some things differently than how they happened, but Hulk Hogan's book just was full of out and out deceit.

Q: What effect do you think the Internet and wrestling sites have had on the wrestling business?

A: It hurt the product a lot, and that is a big negative of the Internet and newsletters, to a degree. Before, people were putting together angles to make money, and they thought about it as if people thought it was real. Now, they feel like they have to be one step ahead, like they have to fool the people on the Internet, and when they fool them, they write a story that makes no sense and just confuses people. It's like Jerry Jarrett, sitting there thinking how he can fool people. The days of fooling people are over. They've got to write a story to keep people interested. The people who should know better don't.

Q: What have you thought about mainstream media coverage of wrestling over the years, especially regarding the big stories you've followed closely?

A: It's better than it used to be, but it used to be absolutely horrible. Nowadays, it varies. I still see more bad than good, but they look more at the facts than they used to. In the old days, they were trying to expose that it was fake. If anything, Vince's admission in 1989 has at least gotten rid of those annoying stories. I always thought those so-called "exposes" were stupid when they came out. That aspect is long gone. Unfortunately for wrestling people, the story today is that wrestling is a declining business.

Q: That being the case, how long can the Observer be viable? How long do you plan to continue doing this?

A: Well, it's not something you plan. It's more a matter of where life takes you, what's going to happen in wrestling and what will happen in life. I don't have a set plan for it. There's certainly no plan for me to do anything but what I'm doing. I guess, if the thing turns out like roller derby, I'd better have a backup (laughs).

Q: After 20 years of covering this seedy business, what keeps you interested in covering professional wrestling?

A: I still like the business, and I still like covering it. I enjoy watching the TV, the ups and downs, and seeing what's going to happen, seeing what's going on all over the world. Sometimes, I get periods where I get down a little on it, but those times don't last that long. The thing with me is, since I'm covering a wide variety of wrestling around the world, there's always something that keeps me excited. There's almost never a slow news week. This thing's always changing, and I don't know where it's going. It's a really interesting period, but there have been more interesting periods.

Q: What was the most interesting period?

A: Well, WCW going down was certainly an interesting time. It was something that benefitted no one except the people at AOL/Time-Warner who were paying off the losses. I think they wanted to get rid of it. They didn't want to sell to Bischoff, and then Jamie Kellner took over, and he hated wrestling, too. Who knows? Bischoff may have gotten it, and it may have ended up the same way six months later. You just don't know. I certainly didn't expect McMahon to botch it up like he did, but it was still a bad day.

Q: Where do you see your place in wrestling history?

A: I can't even begin to judge that. That's something where someone from the outside has got to look at it. I just know I worked really hard for a long time. If you were to look at history and a list of the top 100 or 1,000 figures, in some ways, I think I maybe belong somewhere in there, but I really don't know.

Q: Overall, what do you think of the state of wrestling journalism today?

A: There is some good, but overall, it could be a lot better, because it's so new, as far as a mainstream thing. The big problem I see is that too many people are doing it as a means to an end, like they're reporting so they can meet the guys. If you're covering someone, you can't be thrilled by meeting them. You may think they're your favorite, or they're the best, but when you meet them, you can't ask for an autograph. In wrestling, with so many people, they're like, "Can I meet these guys?" I think that's not really the job, and it's not good for a reporter to be that way. Even if I admire the talent, and I admire the talent of a lot of the guys, if I started treating it as hero worship, I wouldn't have much credibility.